

## CAUCASIA AND CENTRAL ASIA

spoil of war. This bold German move was greeted with relief by the people of the Republic of Georgia, who were in deadly fear of Turkish advance. German troops went further, occupied the Republic's capital, Tiflis, and extended diplomatic recognition and protection to the new Georgian state. This protection was accepted by the government of Georgia as a safeguard against both the Turkish and the Bolshevik menace. In this behavior the Germans were not motivated by any altruistic sympathy toward Georgia. Their entry into the Caucasus was dictated by the desire to seize the rich Baku oil fields in the neighboring Republic of Azerbaijan before the Turks could lay their hands upon them.

Thus the separation of the Transcaucasian republics from Russia not only created three new states, it also provoked changes of tremendous strategic significance for both camps fighting the World War. In order to grasp the military implications of these events, we must realize that prior to the Bolshevik Revolution Russia maintained a front running from the vicinity of Trebizond in the north, through Lake Van and Kurdistan, to the southern parts of Iranian Azerbaijan. This was a mobile front, with the Russians penetrating deep into Turkish territory as far as the city of Erzerum, and the Turks getting hold of the Lake Urumia region in Iran. Owing to the Bolshevik Revolution the Russian armies gradually melted away. Soldiers deposed then-officers, formed Soviets and organized the evacuation of troops from Turkey and Iran, or spontaneously deserted their units. This Russian withdrawal produced a vacuum. To be sure, the new republics replaced Russian political

authority with  
their own. But militarily they were too weak to serve  
as a substitute  
for the seasoned Russian divisions. Besides, the new  
states were not  
uniformly opposed to the advance of the Central  
Powers. Their sym-  
pathies were divided. While Georgia, as mentioned  
previously, did  
not mind permitting Germany to enter her territory,  
Azerbaijan as  
a Moslem state was willing to collaborate with the  
Turks. Hence  
there was no question of any unified Transcaucasian  
resistance to  
the invasion of Turko-German armies. The Germans  
and their  
Turkish allies were resolved to penetrate into this  
vacuum and reach,  
if possible, the Caspian Sea coast through  
Azerbaijan. If this plan